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OPENING STATEMENT BY SENATOR BYRON DORGAN AT SENATE HEARING LOOKING INTO REPORTS OF STEROID USE IN BASEBALL

(WASHINGTON, D.C.) --- Following is the text of the opening statement by U.S. Senator Byron Dorgan (D-ND), Chairman of the U.S. Senate Subcommittee on Consumer Affairs, Foreign Commerce and Tourism, at the hearing held by the subcommittee Tuesday in Washington, D.C. to look into reports of widespread steroid use in Major League baseball, and other sports.

The text follows:

Remarks by
U.S. Senator Byron Dorgan, Chairman
Senate Subcommittee on Consumer Affairs, Foreign Commerce and Tourism

June 18, 2002
Washington, D.C.

Good morning. Baseball is truly America's pastime. To become a big leaguer is synonymous with success, no matter what the endeavor.

However, serious questions are being raised by baseball players themselves as well as critics of the sport about what may be a virtual epidemic of performance enhancing drugs among many of baseball's most talented competitors. The fallout can also be felt in high school and college sports as well where fairness should set the standard for the next generation of amateur and professional athletes.

Bulging muscles clearly attest to the physical strength of our athletes, but anecdotes of drug use suggest many may not have the moral fiber to match. As in any profession, drug use in sports can't be tolerated, or even worse, condoned.

Tragically, what was once a "field of dreams" may deteriorate into a quagmire of controlled substances like muscle-building steroids and human growth hormone, which can literally lead to freakish results. One superstar's head was reputed to have grown two sizes in his late thirties.

Perhaps, the most dramatic proof comes from an article in the June 3rd issue of "Sports Illustrated" by Tom Verducci. He quotes former National League Most Valuable Player Ken Caminiti as saying that he was on steroids when he won that prestigious award in 1996.

Now out of the game and plagued by steroid-related health problems, Caminiti maintains the pressures to perform are so great he wouldn't discourage others from using steroids. Caminiti also says that at least half of major league ball players use steroids.

Another retired baseball star, Jose Canseco, is working on a "tell-all" book in which he will reportedly detail his earlier claims that he, along with eighty-five percent of his former colleagues, are steroid users.

What's the big attraction of drugs like steroids? They can make you bigger and stronger, and in a sport like baseball, those pounds and inches of enhanced muscle mass can lead to more home runs and multi-million dollar paychecks.

For example, Caminiti says he started using steroids in 1996. Prior to that time, he'd never hit more than 26 home runs in a season. However, at the end of that year, he hit 40 homers, had a .326 batting average and was selected the National League's MVP.

However the down side is that the medical consequences can be devastating—for example, heart disease, stroke, aggressive behavior and genital dysfunction. But the damage to baseball's credibility can be even greater.

Unlike professional football, basketball or the Olympics, major league baseball has no drug testing program. Unfortunately, no current or professional baseball players responded to our invitation to discuss this pressing social problem.

Nonetheless, this will be an oversight hearing involving industry officials and experts that my colleague Sen. John McCain and I believe is overdue. Both the players and the owners have an obligation to make sure that major league baseball isn't just about records and revenues. Fair competition is something we have the right to expect. Nor should we forget that these drugs are illegal and banned as performance enhancers. In effect, those who use them for this purpose engage in criminal behavior.

We feel that baseball is more than a sport. It has an extraordinary ability to create role models for American youth. Thus, it must exemplify good sportsmanship. Drugs have no place in our culture, and certainly not in America's big league ball parks.

